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the nearest VA medical center  
or visit the CARES Web site at  
[www.va.gov/CARES](http://www.va.gov/CARES).

For information on VA health  
benefits, call 1-877-222-8387.  
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## **VA PLANS FOR VETERANS' FUTURE HEALTH CARE NEEDS**

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**The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is transforming its health care system to continue to bring health care for veterans into the 21st century.**

**Through CARES - Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services - VA is realigning and enhancing its health care system to meet veterans' needs effectively and efficiently, now and in the future.**

➤ ***Why Is CARES Necessary?***

VA initiated CARES for several reasons. Much of VA's medical structure was built decades ago when the focus was inpatient care. VA has been shifting from a hospital-based system; and, today, more than 80 percent of the treatment VA provides is outpatient care. VA needed a new way to address the projected changes in the veteran population - where veterans will be living, their medical needs and their declining numbers over the next 20 years. VA also must be prepared to treat younger veterans who may need care for illnesses from their service in more

recent deployments and to fulfill VA's role in Homeland Security. In addition, VA needs to determine if other uses can be found for outmoded buildings that are not suitable for delivering modern health care.

➤ ***How Does CARES Work?***

VA's medical system - the largest in the country with more than 1,300 sites of care - is divided into 21 regional Networks. A pilot CARES study was first conducted in Network 12 (Chicago, Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan). VA is now conducting CARES in the remaining 20 Networks. Data are being gathered on veteran population projections and their projected health care needs, as well as information on the locations of and access to VA facilities, their sizes and the services they currently offer.

The projected data on demand for VA care will then be compared with the facility information, and each Network will develop a Market Plan that will provide a blueprint for matching VA facilities and services with veterans' future health care needs.

Throughout this process, veterans, academic affiliates, employees and others interested in CARES will be kept informed, and their input sought and

considered. Once Network Market Plans are completed, a draft National CARES Plan will be published for public comment and evaluated by an independent CARES Commission appointed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

As part of its review, the CARES Commission will conduct site visits, hold public hearings for stakeholders and solicit their input. Following this process, the Commission will forward its recommendations to the Secretary, who will make his decision on the National CARES Plan in late 2003.

➤ ***How Will Veterans Benefit?***

This comprehensive analysis and restructuring of VA health care will change only the way VA delivers care - health care services will not be reduced. The goal of CARES is to enhance outpatient and inpatient care, as well as special programs, such as spinal cord injury and blind rehabilitation, and long-term care.

Once CARES is completed, VA will have a national plan for directing resources where they are most needed; preserving VA's missions and special services; and, at the same time, continuing to provide high-quality care to more veterans in more locations.

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